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SUBJECT: BELGIAN LT GENERAL BUYSE SHARES LESSONS LEARNED IN
AFRICA WITH AFRICOM

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Classified By: Charge Wayne Bush for reason 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Belgium's Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Training, Lieutenant General Jean-Paul Buyse, shared Belgian experience and lessons learned in Africa with Africom's Commander, Gen. William Ward and his staff during a visit to Africom HQ in Stuttgart on April 15. Buyse provided an overview of the strategic framework for Belgium's defense policy in Africa and the types of missions and tasks Belgium has conducted. His team then provided an in-depth review of Belgium's ongoing Military Partnership Programs (MPPs) in Benin, the DRC, and Burundi. Lessons learned included "African specifics" such as leaders' tendency to rely on short term visions, their desire for personal gain and differences in education; challenges posed by family members accompanying troops to their posts; the need for "adapted cooperation" encompassing a realistic international and very long term approach with effective multilateral and bilateral dialogue; and the need to give the appearance of remaining neutral between parties in conflict. Lessons learned from MPP experience included promoting gradual local ownership of programs while the donor maintains a "look over the shoulder" involvement; differentiating between real military needs and mere wants; and sustainability of military projects where management of resources and people has never been a priority.

Africom officers told Buyse about their plans to build on the Belgian MPP in Benin, and Buyse said he would name a liaison officer for Africom's Benin programs. Africom officers also provided Buyse a readout of its military training plans in the DRC, and Buyse promised information that could be helpful to U.S. planning. He provided a plan Belgium used for family housing during the meeting, and said he would also send plans for the former Belgian base the U.S. will renovate and a copy of course items Belgium used in training. End Summary.

Introduction: Strategic Framework and Missions

12. (C) Buyse provided Africom's General Ward with a broad overview of Belgium's strategic framework for its Africa missions, lessons learned, and recent MPPs during his April 15 visit to Stuttgart. Belgium's strategic framework for defense policy in Africa is drawn from several sources: UN policy in Africa, the EU-African Partnership, Belgium's

foreign policy in the Great Lakes region, Belgian development and cooperation priorities (13 of Belgium's 18 partner countries are in Africa), MOD strategic planning, and Belgium's security sector reform (SSR) projects in various countries. These broad goals have been channeled into five missions and tasks: reinforcement of African peace keeping operations (PKO), Belgian PKOs, MPPs, humanitarian missions, and non-combatant evacuation operations. The Belgian MOD has considerable experience in the region, and Buyse shared lessons learned that are applicable to all of sub-Saharan Africa and more specific MPPs.

Generic Lessons Learned

13. (C) Buyse's team began the lessons learned discussion with "African specifics". The MOD said many African leaders talk about a long term vision for the continent's future when speaking to international donors, but as a practical matter focus on short term personal gain and what they can get before the next election or coup at the national level. African governments and militaries have different concepts of ownership, management, and responsibility than Western standards. Leaders often ask for high tech and advanced equipment or facilities although their military capabilities and infrastructure needs are low tech. Levels of education vary widely; some officials and officers are illiterate while others hold advanced degrees. The second generic lesson learned is what the MOD referred to as "adapted cooperation".

This means developing effective communication and a comprehensive long term approach among donor countries, in part to avoid duplication of effort and being played off against each other by African partners; regular and straightforward bilateral and multilateral dialogue with

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African partners based on trust; and effective bilateralism and multilateralism to prevent African countries playing one donor off against another. Programs developed for Africa should be sustainable, simple, and effective, Buyse said. It is important to look out for collusion and duplicity while avoiding arrogance in dealing with African nationals. Neutrality is also important when dealing with regional leaders who have different goals and rivalries.

MPP-Specific Lessons Learned

14. (C) Belgium's MPPs in Benin, the DRC, and Burundi generated specific lessons. The Belgians suggested that equality between donors and African partner countries is important, but ownership, accountability, and sustainability are important concerns as well. Programs should aim to turn control of programs over to host governments gradually, until the donor's role becomes a long term advise and train approach as duties are performed. Strategic visions can be hindered by African leaders' short term priorities. Accountability requires the donor to keep engaged and promote outside evaluation that can include African nations, while at the same time setting clear, written expectations for host country performance. To ensure training and other projects are sustainable, Belgium suggests a priority on developing education and expertise, especially train-the-trainer (TTT) programs. Civil-military cooperation projects require regular follow up by donors for up to three to four years to ensure equipment is properly used and maintained. Good management should be encouraged at all levels. Logistical challenges vary and are also key. For longer term sustainability, developing networks between African leaders and donor country trainers and officers is valuable.

MPP Benin and Operation Shared Accord

15. (C) Buyse and his staff provided a relatively upbeat readout on Belgium's MPP in Benin, which began in 1999.

Belgium trained Beninese peacekeepers now serving in Cote D'Ivoire and with MONUC. It has hosted Benin officers at the Royal Military Academy in Brussels. Belgian military engineers coached Beninese engineers in the building of a new road in the Mono area of Benin and built schools and medical facilities as civil-military projects. The MOD also trained A-109 helicopter pilots and technicians. Ongoing training includes annual C-130 and paratrooper training and biannual peacekeeper programs to ensure sustainability. Most of the training takes place at Bembereke training area in the north of the country. Belgium is working on increasing Beninese autonomy, and believes the peacekeeper programs are well on their way. The A-109 program will likely require "over the shoulder" supervision for some time. Belgium considers this mature partnership a success. The main challenge will be instilling a maintenance and resource management mindset. Other problems include the lack of local medical care which requires that trainers bring with them a mobile hospital and have medevac capacity. Also, roads are dangerous and when local people are hit by Belgian vehicles, it creates significant expense for the operation. Africom told Buyse that it is preparing to launch "Operation Shared Accord" with Benin, using and improving some of the Belgian built firing ranges at Bembereke. In discussions with the U.S., a Beninese general has said he wants Bembereke to become an ECOWAS regional training center. Buyse said he was aware of this goal, but said there is only one center per region and it is unclear if Bembereke will be so designated. Buyse also offered to name a Belgian liaison officer for Shared Accord to share information with Africom.

MPP DRC

16. (C) Belgium's Congo MPP began in 2004 with several different projects that have encountered significant difficulties. Belgium has trained the Congo's 1st Brigade, conducted multiple TTT programs, trained construction engineers, and provided equipment and training for a

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bridge-building team in the eastern DRC. "Brassage and mixage" training combines Congolese units (FARDC) with former CNDP and FDLR soldiers and has worked well. Soldiers from rebel factions came in from the bush without weapons, which Buyse believes are probably still cached in the jungle for possible future use. Buyse's team noted major management difficulties in the Congolese military at all levels. General Buyse added that it is important to be aware of parallel command structures that may exist outside of the military structure; presidential loyalists often make the real decisions without consulting the military command. The GOB remains uncertain regarding whether President Kabila actually supports the SSR process.

17. (C) Buyse provided an in-depth description of the ongoing rapid reaction force (RRF) training program that is a key component of Belgium's SSR efforts in the DRC. From Belgium's perspective the GoDRC did not meet its commitments to pay, feed and house the soldiers to keep the units together. As a result, the first units simply disappeared after training. The current training is taking place in Kananga and will move to Kindu. It should be completed by May 15. Belgium will conduct "permanent" training refreshers every six to seven months, in order to keep the units cohesive and prevent the soldiers from disbanding again. The MOD maintains a dialogue with both the military and the "unofficial" command structures. The MOD tracks the distribution of pay to prevent the pilfering of the salaries if transported by DRC officials. Belgium has also built secure family housing for the soldiers' families that travel with them to combat zones. In general, Buyse said Congolese soldiers are good if provided with food, housing, and transportation.

18. (C) Africom officers described current and proposed

projects in the DRC. A military information and support team (MIST) is stationed in Kivu under the direction of the Ambassador and works on disarmament (DDR) programming. Africom is now developing a proposal to train a light infantry battalion. The training would begin with 100 officers and 100 non-commissioned officers in Kinshasa, who would then transfer to Kisangani where the enlisted soldiers would join and bring the number of trainees to 650. The DRC has offered an abandoned Belgian base to Africom, which would upgrade the facilities with Belgian-trained Congolese engineers. General Buyse provided plans Belgium had developed for family housing, which he deems important because family members routinely accompany Congolese soldiers into the field. He said he would also provide Africom the plans of the old Belgian base and Belgian training curricula as soon as possible.

Burundi

¶9. (C) The Burundi MPP began after the peace agreement in 2006. Belgium supported the integration of the differing factions into the Burundian armed forces. Belgium's first engineer training program failed when the engineers disappeared, and Belgium has committed to regularly retraining the current group of engineers it is now training to prevent abandonment. Burundian officers were trained at the Belgian military academy in a TTT program. In 2009, Belgium's MPP projects include training Burundian armed forces in human and material resources and ongoing coaching of the TTT trainees. Belgium hopes to work on integrating the FNL, the last remaining faction that has not integrated. Lessons learned in Burundi include taking a DDD approach to SSR, the importance of neutrality during the military harmonization, and building from a partnership "for" peace to a partnership "at" peace.

Africom - Belgium Discussion

¶10. (C) In a wide-ranging discussion with AFRICOM officers, General Buyse discussed a number of Africa-related issues. Asked why the Congolese Army should not be disbanded and started again from scratch if it is as ineffectual as Buyse

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suggested, Buyse said that the Congo is a big country and some kind of army is needed to keep it together. There are some officers who appreciate and want change but for now there are not enough of them, he said. Modern military culture needs to keep developing and it is a slow evolution. If you go back to nothing, then you start with nothing, he concluded. He recommended that when dealing with MOD and other government officials in capitals, donor countries should give the government a written list of what they plan to do, then give a list of what they expect the host country to do and get agreement on it. A chronic problem is that troops in Congo are not paid, and then desert. Finding ways to ensure troops are paid and fed, coupled with a long-term commitment, is important to success.

¶11. (C) Buyse said that Belgium has little contact with Chinese officials working in Congo. The Belgians hear a lot of mixed feelings about the Chinese from the Congolese leadership and population. There is some aversion because the Chinese make little effort at integrating. The leadership is disappointed because Chinese promises are not always fulfilled. But Buyse believes the Chinese do not have to be a problem if handled correctly. One Gabon officer told him that the Europeans left a vacuum in Africa and the Chinese have come and filled it.

¶12. (C) Buyse was critical of the way the Lord's Resistance Army was handled in Uganda and the DRC. He said that Joseph Kony never was a threat to Kinshasa, until he was pushed out of his stronghold, and now he is a problem for the

international community and has done a lot of damage. Belgium has no plans to take direct military action against Kony's army because the chances of failure are too great. Kony has charisma and must be confronted on a more personal basis, Buyse concluded.

¶13. (C) Buyse and Ambassador Yates both agreed that better cooperation is needed between Western countries in Kinshasa. Ambassadorial level meetings tend to be too official, Yates said. She said the ongoing Defense Attache and Deputy Chief of Mission meetings are good. Buyse observed several times during the day that the Congolese will be interested in working bilaterally with the U.S. and with Belgium. But they will not be much interested in working tri-laterally because they think they will get more if the two countries are divided. However, Buyse said, if the choice is tri-lateral cooperation or nothing, they will agree.

Comment

¶14. (C) This meeting was the culmination of post's year-long effort to enhance U.S. - Belgian coordination and dialogue. Both Africom and the MOD found the exchange valuable, and long term cooperation on individual operations is likely in the future, including participation in the Africa Partnership Station by Belgium and contributions to Belgium's annual exercises in Benin by Africom.

Comment: Buyse affirmed Belgium would be in Africa for the long haul and is committed to working with partners on the ground.

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